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Security Council

Sixty-second year

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Wednesday, 13 June 2007, 3.20 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Verbeke	(Belgium)
Members:	China	Mr. Li Junhua
	Congo	Mr. Gayama
	France	Mr. Lacroix
	Ghana	Mr. Christian
	Indonesia	Mr. Kleib
	Italy	Mr. Mantovani
	Panama	Mr. Soler Torrijos
	Peru	Mr. Gallardo
	Qatar	Mr. Al-Bader
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Slovakia	Mr. Burian
	South Africa	Ms. Qwabe
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. Khalilzad

Agenda

The situation concerning Iraq

Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 30 of resolution 1546 (2004) (S/2007/330)

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07-38126 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning Iraq

Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 30 of resolution 1546 (2004) (S/2007/330)

The President (*spoke in French*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Iraq in which he requests to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

On behalf of the Council, I extend a warm welcome to His Excellency, Mr. Hoshyar Zebari, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Zebari (Iraq) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq.

It is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2007/330, containing the report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 30 of resolution 1546 (2004).

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear briefings by Mr. Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, and by His Excellency Mr. Zalmay Khalilzad, Permanent Representative of the United States, on behalf of the Multinational Force.

I now give the floor to Mr. Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq.

Mr. Qazi: The report (S/2007/330) before the Security Council illustrates the severity of the challenges facing Iraq and the efforts of the Government of Iraq, neighbouring countries and the wider international community to address them. The gravity of the situation is self-evident from the daily misery and suffering endured by the people of Iraq. Despite the notable and courageous efforts of the Iraqi and multinational security forces to stem the violence, progress has been slower and more uncertain than had been hoped for when the current set of security initiatives was launched, four months ago. Iraq is today faced with an exceptionally complex series of overlapping sectarian, political and ethnic conflicts that are beyond the capacity of any one actor or policy to resolve. That situation has contributed to a deepening sense of insecurity and pessimism among many. Today's revisiting of the 22 February 2006 tragedy of the Al-Askari shrine in Samarra only add to our concerns.

It has been nearly three years since I took up my assignment as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq. I have come to admire the wonderful resilience of the people of Iraq in adversity. But they are, after all, human, and they are entitled at last to see the light at the end of the long, dark tunnel in which they have been forced to live their lives for so long. But what do too many of them still see? They still see themselves and their children engulfed by every kind of violence. They see themselves without protection, and often without basic services. They see their leaders struggling to reach basic agreements on basic issues. They often see an endless blame game, instead of mutual accommodation and reconciliation. They see the world as just watching their tragedy or not doing as much as it should to alleviate it. But they do not give up hope, even when they see little reason to hope.

In his report, the Secretary-General has commented on the positive and serious efforts during the reporting period to activate the International Compact with Iraq, the establishment of working

groups with Iraq's neighbours in the field of security, energy supplies and displaced Iraqis and progress in reviewing the constitution and setting up a new electoral commission. Those are important and valuable developments. There are also political, security, economic and social benchmarks that the Iraqi Government is expected to implement. But to make a difference on the ground they will have to form part of, and contribute to, an effective political reconciliation process in Iraq. In addition, a concerted effort in support of reconciliation in Iraq by its neighbours and the international community will be required. The Council is uniquely placed to support such efforts.

The hope implicit in resolution 1546 (2004) that the achievement of specific political benchmarks within specific timelines would enable Iraq to make progress towards genuine national reconciliation has not yet been realized.

Contentious issues have been discussed in several forums, including the Political Committee for National Security, the Cabinet, the Council of Representatives, the constitutional review process, et cetera. However, the impact of bitter memories, fresh grievances, perceived discrimination, increasingly entrenched identity politics, mutual mistrust and, above all, the horrific and unending killings, has brought about an environment in which constructive and productive discussions leading to lasting reconciliation appear to be very difficult. Achieving benchmarks is not the same as reaching milestones on the path to reconciliation.

The international community cannot allow itself to become a spectator of the unfolding situation, if only because of the unconscionable human cost involved. The international community not only has a vital security stake in the stability of Iraq, it also has an inescapable moral obligation to encourage and enable the Government of Iraq in building inclusive and cumulative processes that can bring stability. While the Government of Iraq is the first to acknowledge that primary responsibility for rescuing the country falls upon itself, it is also the case that the magnitude and number of challenges confronting the Government entitles it to call upon the international community for necessary assistance. The International Compact with Iraq and structures established by the regional meetings provide a potentially solid framework for vital cooperation.

Iraq's leaders support a fair distribution of power, equitable sharing of national resources and wealth, democracy and the rule of law, et cetera. However, in practice it is often difficult to strike a mutually acceptable balance between competing claims on basic issues. That balance can only be struck if democratic politics is seen as more than just a competition between majority and minority rights and more than a power struggle between political communities. That is especially the case in countries like Iraq, which are undergoing a comprehensive transition process that involves nation-rebuilding.

In such situations, fundamental questions relating to the future of the country have to be answered by more than rhetoric and general statements of principle. Answers need to be given in the shape of agreed and specific policy measures that, by effectively addressing the priorities of the people of Iraq, progressively transform despair into hope. If the levels of despair and hope among the Iraqi people have worsened or remain essentially unaltered, it is time for the leaders of Iraq, the international community and the United Nations to consider how to enable Iraq to move forward on a more assured basis.

The constitutional review process is itself a result of the assessment by Iraq's political leadership that further reflection on key constitutional issues is required. The United Nations has been privileged to assist with a range of technical advice that has laid out options for tackling most of the contentious issues. But the key decisions remain political. For those decisions to serve the national interests of Iraq, they need to be made by democratically elected Iraqi representatives and leaders in a way that strengthens a sense of popular participation and national unity.

Fortunately, the choices before the Iraqi people are not black and white; nor are they zero-sum. There is a whole range of grey areas of compromise which can accommodate the essential concerns of all participants in the political process. Those choices often need to be spelled out with professional expertise in a clear and concise manner; our constitutional support team has been doing just that. This kind of assistance can be extended to other areas where mutual understanding, accommodation and compromise are essential to progress. The political leaders can be persuaded that they are not always faced with zero-sum choices on basic issues. Once that is appreciated, the constitutional review process and several other

processes — such as the legislative programme, provincial elections, peacefully negotiating the implementation of constitutional provisions, a fair sharing of oil revenues, depoliticizing ministerial appointments and recruitment to security forces, transitional justice, strengthening human rights and humanitarian protection systems, et cetera — can be extremely effective vehicles for reconciliation while simultaneously closing off space for the perpetrators of violence and political extremism.

Few Iraqi families have been spared the direct and indirect consequences of violence and human rights violations. It is natural that many of them have a deep sense of victimization. Justice, which is another essential pillar for reconciliation, requires that actual victims are assisted and compensated for their loss. These may be individuals detained without charge, involuntarily displaced persons inside or outside the country, families that have lost their main source of income through violence or discrimination, et cetera.

A variety of initiatives are now under way to alleviate the plight of externally displaced persons, by the Government of Iraq, host Governments — especially Syria and Jordan — and the international community through the efforts of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other relief agencies. However, a much broader internal initiative supported by the international community will be needed to address the plight of internally displaced persons and of the Iraqis in general. The people of Iraq need to see tangible, sustained and effective measures to improve the conditions of their daily lives and to build their confidence in the political process and their own future.

The Secretary-General's latest report once again expresses serious concern about the human rights situation in Iraq. It is clear that all of the institutions of law and order in Iraq face severe challenges. Even so, as State institutions bound by the norms of international human rights law, they are held to standards set by those norms, especially with regard to the protection of non-derogable rights. Criminals and extremists of all stripes who use violence and vengeance against innocent civilians for their aims have already displayed their callous contempt for all norms of civilized behaviour. The Government of Iraq has a particular responsibility to bring to justice the perpetrators of such acts while strengthening the institutions that promote the rule of law, particularly the security forces and the judiciary.

Accordingly, I urge the Government of Iraq and others who are undoubtedly committed to humanitarian and human rights protection, to work closely with the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on how to best achieve that goal with a view to realizing an early improvement in the human rights situation. That effort would also immensely strengthen the political reconciliation process.

In conclusion, there is an urgency about the situation in Iraq that the international community needs to take note of and respond to. If the political and security situation in Iraq is not improved over the coming months, there is a danger that its several crises may escalate even further. The United Nations, with the support of the Security Council and the Government of Iraq, has the potential to effectively assist and develop national dialogue and reconciliation processes, regional cooperation on Iraq, and international support. In reviewing the UNAMI mandate, the Council may wish to consider how best to harness that potential in the service of the Iraqi Government and people.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Special Representative Qazi for his briefing.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Zalmay Khalilzad, Permanent Representative of the United States.

Mr. Khalilzad (United States of America): I am pleased to report to the Security Council on behalf of the Multinational Force in Iraq (MNF-I). I warmly welcome Iraq's Foreign Minister, Mr. Zebari, and am pleased that he could be here with us today. I also want to thank Special Representative Ashraf Qazi for his work and for his report on the important efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI).

It is clear that the Iraqi Government confronts significant security challenges as it strives to promote stability and consolidate Iraq's young democracy. Success will depend not only on progress in the security sector, where MNF-I plays an important supporting role, but also on advances in the economic field and, most important, movement in the political arena. We welcome the efforts expended over the last

three months, while noting that much work remains to be done.

With your permission, Mr. President, I will now provide an update on those efforts, which include activities in Iraq's political, economic and security sectors, as well as in the region and with the international community.

In the political arena, progress on national reconciliation is essential to ensure that security efforts under way will result in long-term stability in the country and in the region. To that end, we welcome efforts by Iraqi leaders who are engaged in activities designed to promote national reconciliation. For example, as Mr. Qazi mentioned, the Constitutional Review Committee continues its work to address outstanding constitutional matters. Last month, the Committee announced that it had prepared a draft plan to reform the constitution. The Committee's work will provide a solid foundation for a successful Iraq, and we look forward to its sustained effort on this fundamental matter.

We also welcome the selection of the new Commissioners for the Independent High Electoral Commission and the work under way to prepare for provincial elections. Additional legislation is being formulated that will outline the powers of provincial councils and their relationship to national Government institutions. We welcome those efforts, as well as the work of the newly created Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration Committee, dealing with militias and other unauthorized military formations, and we look forward to the achievement of other benchmarks on reconciliation, such as the passage of a law to reform the de-Baathification process.

I now turn to the economic front. We welcome the launch of the International Compact with Iraq, on 3 May, and appreciate the support of Secretary-General Ban. The emphasis now is on implementing the economic initiatives that the Government of Iraq has committed to undertake. The support of the international community for Iraq will be important for the Compact's success. The cooperation between Iraq and the United Nations has been key to the successful launch of that initiative and will remain critical during the implementation phase. Further advances in Iraq's economic reform, however, will require the passage of legislation on the hydrocarbons sector with regulations governing oil revenue-sharing. Iraq must also press ahead with its efforts to improve budget execution, particularly for reconstruction projects initiated by key ministries and the provincial governments and for essential support in service delivery.

On the security front, insurgents, militias, terrorists and criminals continue their destabilizing actions. We strongly condemn this morning's vicious attack on the holy shrines of Imam Ali al-Hadi and Imam Hassan al-Askari in Samarra, and we share the outrage of the Iraqi people at that crime. It is another deliberate attempt by terrorists to sow dissent and inflame sectarian strife among the people of Iraq. We call on all Iraqis to reject that provocation.

Most of the attacks in Iraq have occurred in Baghdad, Anbar, Salah al Din and Diyala provinces, and the majority of the victims are Iraqi civilians. We regret the suffering of the Iraqi people and the many innocent lives lost. Those seeking to undermine Iraq continue to use a variety of methods to kill and maim, as witnessed by the use of lethal vehicle-borne improvised explosive bombings in the Baghdad area in April. Also in April, a suicide bomber blew himself up in the building housing the Iraqi Council of Representatives, killing one Council member and wounding several other people. In a demonstration of resolve to stand up to terrorists, the Council met the following day. We applaud that courageous act and commitment to serving the interests of the Iraqi people.

Operation Fardh al-Qanun — "imposing the law" — continues to work to improve security in the Baghdad area in order to provide the time and space for political and economic progress. The Operation is entering its fifth month, and although it is still too early to project results, there have been signs of a significant shift in the distribution of the violence. While high-profile terrorist attacks and attacks against coalition forces are still frequent, sectarian murders and attacks against civilians in Baghdad have decreased from the levels seen in January. We are also seeing significant increases in the number of weapons caches found. Iraqi and multinational forces continue to establish joint security stations and combat outposts in the city and in surrounding areas. The performance of the Iraqi Security Forces is critical to the success of those efforts.

There are other developments in Iraq's stand against the insurgency. Opposition to Al-Qaida in

Anbar province is growing, aided by combined operations in Ramadi with Iraqi security and multinational forces that include the establishment of Iraqi police stations and joint security stations throughout the city. Iraqi security forces are recruiting in greater numbers in Anbar province, demonstrating the determination of the people to participate in the fight against insurgents and Al-Qaida and to assist with the security of the country. We see considerable interest and activity in other provinces with regard to extending the success of the popular resistance to Al-Qaida that has been demonstrated in Anbar province.

Iraqi security forces are undertaking a greater role in Iraq's security, taking the lead in raids and other operations to combat insurgents, militias, terrorists and criminals. In the month of May, the Iraqi Special Operations Forces Brigade alone conducted more than 48 operations targeting terrorists, regardless of their sect. Iraqi forces continue to conduct operations throughout the country.

As part of the continuing process of handing over the security lead to Iraqi security forces, multinational forces transferred security responsibility for the southern Iraq province of Maysan in April and for the northern provinces of Sulaimaniya, Erbil and Dohuk on 30 May. Iraqi security forces have now assumed the security lead in seven provinces. We are working steadily to achieve further transfers as the Iraqi security forces and Iraqi provincial governments build their capacity to take on that responsibility.

On 4 May, the Egyptian Government hosted an expanded neighbours' meeting in Sharm el-Sheikh to facilitate greater regional dialogue and support for Iraqi efforts to rebuild the country. Follow-up, particularly by the working groups established in Sharm, is needed to continue the momentum begun by that initiative. Iraqi leaders also continue their bilateral outreach to strengthen relations with Iraq's neighbours, and we encourage all parties to expand those efforts. We welcome Turkey's offer to host the next expanded neighbours' meeting later this year.

Securing Iraq's borders is vital. Iraq is not able to accomplish that task on its own; it requires the goodwill and efforts of Iraq's neighbours as well. Not all of Iraq's neighbours have been helpful. We remain concerned that certain countries continue to support violent extremists who seek to undermine Iraq's political progress. The flow of foreign terrorists and weapons into Iraq is particularly destabilizing. We call upon all Member States to repudiate that behaviour and to endorse Prime Minister Al-Maliki's repeated requests for an end to foreign interference in Iraq's political process.

We laud the role of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), which remains firm in its ongoing commitment to help the Iraqi people despite the difficult security environment. The specialized assistance of the United Nations will be critical to Iraq's long-term development and stability. We look forward to the upcoming discussions on how to revise UNAMI's mandate so as to encourage a robust presence to assist Iraq's political and economic progress and to provide humanitarian assistance to refugees and internally displaced people.

We welcome the contributions made in support of United Nations security efforts in Iraq. Georgia, South Korea and Romania have provided security forces for UNAMI that have been essential to the United Nations operations in Iraq. Fiji continues to provide United Nations guard protection. Sustained international support in Iraq — including through contributions to the fund for security expenses, as well as the provision of forces for United Nations security — will enable the United Nations to remain focused on its core assistance objectives in Iraq. MNF-I is ready to assist with United Nations security as necessary.

We extend our sincere appreciation to Special Representative Qazi for his efforts over the past three years to assist the Iraqi Government and people in their rebuilding efforts. Special Representative Qazi has worked closely with the Government of Iraq, the Iraqi people, the multinational forces and regional governments in support of Iraq, and we thank him for his dedication and service.

In closing, let me confirm that the multinational forces remain dedicated to helping the Iraqi security forces build their capabilities so that they may assume full responsibility for securing and defending their country. The international community shares a common interest in ensuring the success of the Iraqi efforts to create a peaceful, stable and prosperous country, which is important not only for the people of Iraq, but also for the region and the entire world.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ambassador Khalilzad for his briefing.

I now invite His Excellency Mr. Hoshyar Zebari, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq, to make a statement.

Mr. Zebari (Iraq): In accordance with Security Council resolution 1723 (2006), the mandate for the Multinational Force in Iraq (MNF-I) is due for review. On behalf of the Government of Iraq, I would like to present an update to the Security Council on the present situation and ongoing developments in our country.

In May this year, Iraq observed the first anniversary of the formation of the constitutionally elected Government that is accountable to the 275 men and women of the Council of Representatives, the first democratically elected legislative body in Iraq's history. The formation of the National Unity Government that is broadly representative of, and governs by the consent of, Iraq's diverse society, marked the completion of the political process as set forth in Security Council resolution 1546 (2004) and consolidated Iraq's commitment to the process of democratization.

The past 12 months have been a critical test of the courage and commitment of the Government and the people of Iraq as we broker a difficult, and often painful, transition towards a stable and peaceful democracy. Despite remarkable progress, a complex political, security and economic environment continues to present formidable challenges to the elected leaders tasked with the normalization of our country.

There is no more definitive example of this threat than today's bombings, which destroyed the remnant of the holy Al-Askaria shrine in Samarra. This shrine, sacred to both Shia and Sunni and revered by all Iraqis regardless of religion, was of no military value whatsoever. Its destruction in today's attack — the second on that shrine in 16 months — was meant symbolically as a message from the terrorists that they are seeking to destroy the fabric of Iraqi society — to destroy inter-religious harmony as well as to destroy the tradition of tolerance and fraternity within each of Iraq's various religious traditions. We Iraqis, standing united as a Government and as a people, utterly reject these obvious attempts to divide us in the hope of sowing the seeds of sectarian and civil war.

Notwithstanding this senseless violence, my Government has made tremendous strides towards the day when security will be provided by a self-sufficient Iraqi national security force. That is our ultimate objective, and it is what we are actively engaged in achieving. While Iraqis will always be grateful for their liberation from an absolute despot, no Iraqi Government official — indeed, no Iraqi citizen — wants the presence of foreign troops on Iraqi soil one day longer than is vitally necessary. But today, and for the foreseeable future at least, the presence of MNF-I troops is vitally necessary, not only for Iraq but also to safeguard regional security and stability.

The situation in our country is difficult and challenging at the moment. While we are eagerly strengthening our nascent democracy and rebuilding our State institutions, the Iraqi people continue to be targeted by a well funded and organized campaign to destroy democracy in our part of the world. As Iraqis have increasingly demonstrated their determination to go forward in rebuilding their country, this campaign has become increasingly vicious. Aside from today's heinous attack, in recent weeks, for example, terrorists have destroyed bridges, seeking to sever the physical ties that link Iraqis together. Although many of the perpetrators of violence are indiscriminate in terms of their victims, their continued wilful targeting of political, civil, educational, economic and, as we saw today, religious institutions is no less than an attack on the modern and historic culture of Iraq.

While the scale of their atrocities is appalling and captures media attention, the ability of these terrorists to influence actual events on the ground is limited. For instance, they continue to target police and army recruits, as is often reported in the media; yet, the numbers of recruits continue to rise through a growing stream of volunteers. Thus, the terrorists have failed to achieve their strategic goal of preventing large numbers of volunteers in the rebuilding of the country.

We have succeeded in recruiting nearly 350,000 men into the armed and security services in Iraq. We are making progress in training and equipping those troops, looking forward to the day when they will be able to secure the peace of the nation without the presence of foreign troops. Yet, this process takes time. It takes time for an esprit de corps to develop, and it takes time for trust and confidence to be built, up and down the ranks. We are building these institutions, doing so under far less than ideal circumstances.

Thus, the role of the Multinational Force continues to be vitally important, in at least two ways.

First, the Multinational Force provides additional strength of arms whenever the need exceeds the capacity of Iraq's armed and security forces. An example of this phenomenon can now be seen in Operation Fardh al-Qanun, or Baghdad security plan, which aims to re-establish the rule of law in Baghdad and to stabilize the rest of the country. This is a difficult and dangerous task, made all the more difficult by the ruthlessness of an enemy unbound by any moral or ethical restrictions. Carrying out this task also has a heavy price, for both Iraqi and multinational forces. Secondly, the Multinational Force is undertaking the training of the Iraqi Armed Forces. Let me say here that the Iraqi people are deeply grateful for their continued efforts and their sacrifice.

The Iraqi Government is responsible for security and for increasing the capacity and capabilities of security forces, including recruitment, training and equipment, as outlined in the letter from Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki to the Security Council dated 11 November 2006 (S/2006/888, annex). We recognize the need to accelerate the build-up of an Iraqi force that is self-sustaining, holds public confidence and is loyal to an Iraqi national agenda. The Government of Iraq is the sole authority to control Iraqi streets, and we are strengthening our stance against all illegal militias and corruption within our national security, army and police.

Iraqi security forces continue to assume greater responsibility for providing security to the people, as their size, experience and capacity increase. In September of last year, the Iraqi Government assumed operational command and control of ground, naval and air force commands. Today, security responsibility for seven governorates has been transferred to the Iraqi authorities, and my Government aspires to increase the number of provinces and governorates under its control with a view towards the day when it has full authority over all 18 governorates.

We look forward to the day when Iraqi forces are able to assume full responsibility for the maintenance of security and stability in Iraq, thus allowing the Multinational Force to complete its mandate and end its presence in the country. Until that day, Iraq continues to need the support of the Multinational Force to assist it in providing a secure environment for the Iraqi people.

Iraq's armed forces, in conjunction with the Multinational Force, are making encouraging progress in their drive to restore law and order to the capital. The number of sectarian-motivated murders — a phenomenon new to Iraq — has greatly reduced since last winter, before operations began.

Preliminary reports indicate that some of those who had been internally displaced from their homes in Baghdad are beginning slowly to return. The worrisome occurrence of militias attempting to ethnically cleanse neighbourhoods within the capital is beginning to be reversed. Apart from the statistics, we see evidence of normalization — businesses reopening, increased traffic and more everyday signs of life on the streets. While it is perhaps too early to declare success, those are not small developments. It is of vital importance that those operations continue as we look forward to the day when normalcy can be restored to the capital, home to one-quarter of Iraq's population.

Of course, it is essential that we ensure that those who have so terrorized Baghdad's population should not find refuge in the surrounding areas. In this respect, too, there is progress to report. Tribal chiefs and ordinary citizens in Anbar and Diyala provinces — the most restive of Iraq's provinces and, for too long, a haven for Al-Qaida terrorists — have shown signs of taking arms and standing up against those terrorists. These citizens are now cooperating closely with the Iraqi forces and the multinational forces.

While we are determined to defeat the forces of those whose only agenda is to destroy the political process in Iraq, my Government is mindful that strategies in addition to the military option must be employed to restore peace and stability.

National reconciliation is also a top priority with which we are contending. As a cornerstone of this reconciliation process, we are working on a draft law to reverse overly aggressive de-Baathification. Past practices, commencing in 2003, failed to differentiate between criminals and non-criminals, and failed to distinguish between those who were ideological members of the party versus those who had joined it simply to be able to support their families — a common practice in autocratic and authoritarian regimes. Those failures will be remedied through legislation.

In addition, and as part of national dialogue and reconciliation, we are now in the process of reviewing

and revising the constitution, with an eye to completing that process this month. Simultaneously, we are working on completing a hydrocarbon law and a law on the distribution of Iraq's assets in a way that fairly insures development throughout the country.

Many have criticized us for taking time to complete what would be, even in a developed democracy operating under ideal circumstances, an ambitious legislative agenda. This process has taken time for two reasons. First, we are convinced that setting these laws on a firm foundation is more important than adhering to some artificial deadline. Secondly, we are not operating exclusively on the principle of majority rule. We do not wish to establish these fundamental and long-serving State institutions on the principle of "50 per cent plus one". We are trying to reach as comprehensive a national consensus as possible so that all groups willing to participate in the political process will feel invested in these institutions.

I would also like to report on our Government's activities in the regional and international arenas, activities which have been quite successful. Conscious of the important role our neighbours can play in helping us stabilize our country, we have worked proactively to bring their representatives together with other important players in the region. Thus, on 10 March, we held in Baghdad an expanded meeting of senior experts representing our neighbours, the permanent members of the Security Council and key international and regional organizations, including, of course, the United Nations. That meeting prepared the ground for the expanded international ministerial conference of Iraq's neighbouring countries, plus Egypt and Bahrain, as well as the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and of the Group of Eight, on 4 May in Sharm el-Sheikh. At that meeting ministers enacted the concrete recommendation made by their experts earlier in Baghdad.

As a consequence, three technical committees have been set up dealing with problems besetting Iraq and affecting our neighbours, namely, security, temporarily displaced persons and energy supplies. Meetings of these technical committees are being prepared, and we have asked the United Nations to assist in their work.

Also, on 3 May, the International Compact with Iraq was launched in the Egyptian city of Sharm el-Sheikh. The launch was attended by over 60 countries and international organizations, and many were represented at the ministerial level. The Compact is a framework developed to help the Iraqi Government achieve its national vision of a unified, democratic, federal, peaceful and prosperous Iraq through a programme of mutual commitments — time-bound commitments by the Iraqi Government to achieve key milestones in security and political and governmental reform and economic reconstruction, and commitments by the international community to provide necessary assistance in the medium term.

In respect to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI), we note that its mandate was set by resolution 1546 (2004) and focused on discrete activities centred around Iraq's political process. This process has been essentially completed. UNAMI rules going forward must evolve better to fit current and future needs, as exemplified by the implementation of the International Compact. We are mindful, however, that circumstances are sufficiently changed, and the relationship between UNAMI and the Government of Iraq must change to reflect that reality.

Our vision of UNAMI is one in which its rule must be responsive to Iraq's needs as expressed by the Government of Iraq. We also expect UNAMI to expand its role to include a greater presence and to facilitate expanding the work of United Nations agencies, such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Development Programme, the World Health Organization, the Food and Agricultural Organization and other such agencies.

I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to thank His Excellency Mr. Ashraf Qazi for his years of dedicated service to Iraq and to the United Nations. During his tenure in Baghdad, he earned the respect of Iraq's political class and the gratitude of the people of Iraq. He will be missed, but we wish him all the best in his future endeavours.

Let me conclude by formally noting my Government's request for the continuation of the arrangements relating to the Development Fund for Iraq and the International Advisory and Monitoring Board for Iraq, for reasons contained in my letter to the President of the Security Council dated 8 June 2007.

Mr. Christian (Ghana): My delegation recognizes the presence here of His Excellency Mr. Hoshyar Zebari, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq. We thank the Secretary-General for his report, and we also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Mr. Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, for his briefing.

As noted in the Secretary-General's report, the ongoing political, sectarian and crime-related problems in Iraq should engage the continued attention of the international community. We therefore endorse his call for strong political support for the people and the Government of Iraq as they strive to achieve peace and security. That is why my delegation welcomes this debate, which demonstrates our collective solidarity with the people of Iraq, especially women and children as well as refugees and displaced persons, who are bearing the brunt of this conflict.

My delegation is encouraged by the approval by the Council of Representatives of the candidatures of nine commissioners to serve on the permanent Independent High Electoral Commission, in accordance with the Commission's law promulgated in January 2007, as well as by the selection by the new Board of Commissioners of new officers, including the Chairman, Chief Electoral Officer and Rapporteur. These incremental steps are essential in building the vital institutions necessary to ensure good governance and respect of the political and constitutional reconstruction endeavours in Iraq.

The assistance provided by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) in this regard, coupled with other technical support given by UNAMI towards the constitutional reconstruction process in Iraq, is highly commendable.

The conference on the Iraq Compact, together with the expanded ministerial conference of the neighbouring countries of Iraq which followed it, demonstrate the increasing role Iraq's neighbours wish to play in bringing the crisis to an end. It is hoped that the commitment made at these meetings will be followed through and go to reinforce the resources already being provided by the donor countries, which contribute to the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq with a view to ensuring the sustainable reconstruction of Iraq. It is our hope that the momentum generated by the conference on the Compact for Iraq will be maintained in order to yield the peace dividend and make a positive impact on Iraq.

We commend the various humanitarian interventions undertaken by United Nations agencies, funds and programmes to provide emergency relief to Iraqi families in dire need of water, food and medicine. We welcome the idea of opening an Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) office in Iraq in order to reinforce and ensure the effective coordination of the humanitarian work of the United Nations in Iraq.

Given the experience of the United Nations in Iraq and the concerns expressed, the Secretary-General supports the mitigating measures aimed at enhancing the safety and security of UNAMI personnel, including the fact that the reinforcement of the overhead security cover for UNAMI in the International Zone in Baghdad should be sustained. The Secretary-General's proposal to make arrangements for the construction of a new United Nations building in Baghdad which would be designed to withstand the prevailing security challenges in Iraq requires special attention. These measures will not only answer the safety needs of United Nations staff, but, equally important, they will facilitate the multifaceted task of the United Nations and UNAMI of reaching out to all segments of the population who are in need of assistance every day.

The report on the human rights situation in Iraq is disturbing. My delegation therefore endorses the outcome of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) conference held in Geneva in April 2007 and calls on the Iraqi Government and all relevant parties to choose the path of national reconciliation and to adhere to the principles of human rights and international law.

We call also on those responsible to release the Iraqi United Nations employees and others who have been kidnapped or gone missing during this reporting period. My delegation also welcomes the decision of the Government of Iraq to grant UNAMI access to Iraqi detention centres and welcomes UNAMI's intention to carry out the first of such visits later this month.

We are not sure of the reasons for the Iraqi Government's inability to ratify the status-of-mission agreement signed with the United Nations in June 2005. We have, however, urged the competent authorities in Iraq to proceed with the necessary

ratification procedures to ensure that UNAMI's presence in Iraq is put on a firmer legal footing.

Finally, my delegation would like to express its appreciation to the Deputy Representation for Iraq, Mr. Jean-Marie Fakhouri, who is leaving the United Nations Mission in Iraq at the end of this month, for his invaluable services.

Mr. Lacroix (France) (*spoke in French*): My delegation would like at the outset to welcome the presence in the Council of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq, Hoshyar Zebari. I would like also to thank Mr. Ashraf Qazi as well as Ambassador Khalilzad for their respective briefings.

For my part, I will make the following comments.

My first comment concerns the situation on the ground, which is clearly of concern. It is of concern first of all in terms of security, even though it is still probably too early to assess the new measures taken, in particular the plan put in place in Baghdad. The picture remains a gloomy one. Iraq is the scene of too many attacks. Today's fresh attack against the Shi'ite mosque in Samarra is proof of this. France vigorously condemns that attacks and calls on all parties to exercise utmost restraint.

The people of Iraq continue to pay a very high price. Hundreds, probably thousands, of innocent people have been killed in the past few weeks. The Green Zone itself is now hit on a regular basis, even the Parliament, which was the target of a suicide attack. In addition, the militias — whose deadly activities we had hoped would decrease — have, according to the Secretary-General, resumed their assassinations and kidnappings.

The situation on the ground is of concern also in humanitarian terms. The Secretary-General confirms that Iraq is experiencing a major crisis, stating that the situation is continuing to deteriorate. Between 30,000 and 50,000 Iraqis are leaving the country each month, in addition to the 4 million Iraqis who are internally displaced or refugees within or outside the country.

Above and beyond this, it is urgent now more than ever to work collectively to seek solutions. Along those lines, a number of developments should be noted.

First of all, at the internal level, the Secretary-General has noted some progress, and we hope that it will continue and enable the political process to proceed. I would also note the Iraqi Government's adoption of a draft hydrocarbon law which will now be debated and approved by the Parliament. It is a draft that, we know, deals with the key question of how to distribute Iraq's wealth.

I would also note the upcoming conclusions of the work of the Constitutional Review Committee, which has been done in cooperation with United Nations teams and whose vital importance is clear to all.

At the regional level, some developments have taken place such as the Sharm el-Sheikh meeting, which brought together a number of neighbouring countries on the basis of important principles such as the stability and unity of Iraq and refusal to interfere in its internal affairs, and made it possible also to lay the foundation for strengthened regional cooperation in the areas of security, energy and refugees.

Finally, there have been some international developments: the holding of the conference organized by the High Commissioner for Refugees on the question of displaced persons — now a priority issue for the United Nations — and the launching of the International Compact with Iraq.

It is now necessary to build on this beginning momentum. Of course, the solution rests with Iraq and with a true process of national reconciliation, one that is as inclusive as possible and that will isolate those forces that want to see Iraq fail. That requires all Iraqi officials to come to an agreement on key issues, first of all on the equitable sharing of power and of resources, which must be the subject of a broad consensus.

The countries of the region, which have no interest in seeing chaos prevail in Iraq, will themselves need to play their full role. All efforts that would allow them to contribute to the stabilization of Iraq should be encouraged. In that respect, it is important that the working groups on the questions of security, energy and humanitarian issues, whose establishment was decided at Sharm el-Sheikh on 4 May, develop specific proposals for cooperation. France, of course, fully agrees with the call of the Secretary-General to maintain the momentum established at Sharm el-Sheikh.

Finally, the international community must remain mobilized to maintain this international and regional momentum. That is why the Secretary-General went to

Baghdad, thereby sending a strong message. It is the reason for the International Compact with Iraq, which is an ambitious project that can function only if there is respect for reciprocal commitments without losing sight of the political dimension of the problem.

That is the goal of the commitment of United Nations, which continues to play a major role in stabilizing Iraq under very difficult conditions and which could, as the Secretary-General has suggested, perhaps play a broader role — provided, of course, that security requirements are fully respected. It is also the objective of the Multinational Force in Iraq, whose mandate, pursuant to resolution 1723 (2006), will draw to a close once the Iraqi forces are fully responsible for maintaining security and stability in the country.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): First, I would like to thank Mr. Qazi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for having presented the report (S/2007/330) of the Secretary-General on the situation in Iraq and the work of United Nations agencies there. We take note of Mr. Khalilzad's briefing on the Multinational Force, the Development Fund for Iraq and the International Advisory and Monitoring Board.

We are grateful for the statement made by Mr. Zebari, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq, who informed us about the Government's stepped up efforts to stabilize the situation in the country. We agree with the conclusions and assessments of the Secretary-General's report; we would like to make a few comments in that regard.

We believe that, as confirmed at the Sharm el-Sheikh meeting in May, the international community, through its collective efforts, is trying to help to achieve the prompt and sustainable normalization of the situation in Iraq. We are convinced that, without effective international assistance for the political process, the leaders of the various groups in Iraq will not be able to overcome the inertia resulting from mutual distrust. Given that situation, if national agreement is to be achieved, we need the mediation of the United Nations, the League of Arab States, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Non-Aligned Movement, Iraq's neighbours and other countries that have an opportunity to help Baghdad.

It is important that the final statement of the Sharm el-Sheikh meeting accorded priority to goals and tasks aimed at achieving a settlement and stressed the need for inter-Iraqi conciliation and broad exchanges of ideas among various communities and groups.

We are very concerned about the information concerning the renewed terrorist act in Samarra, which caused further destruction of holy sites that had already been damaged in the bombing of February 2006. We express sympathy to the faithful who were outraged by that heinous extremist act. At the same time, we call on all Iraqis and Iraqi communities to remain calm and not to succumb to the outrage of radicalism. We hope that the provocative act in Samarra will not — as in 2006 — lead to a new round of cruel inter-ethnic fighting. We support the efforts of the Al-Maliki Government, which are aimed at preventing renewed spiral of crisis in the country.

Here, I would like to stress that the key to success for a genuine national dialogue in Iraq is that all religious, ethnic and political groups should feel included in the political process and that they have a democratic opportunity to find their place within the Iraqi power structure. That must be ensured if we want Iraq to remain one undivided sovereign State. We also need to provide deadlines by which the Multinational Force — which, we must say, is a serious irritant for many Iraqis — will leave the country. We are not speaking of the immediate announcement of a date. But it appears to be important for Iraqis to see the prospect of a full end to the foreign military presence in their country.

We note that one of the major results of the Sharm el-Sheikh meeting was the adoption of a Russian initiative to establish a standing body to coordinate the efforts of interested parties on Iraq. We are awaiting information on the start of the work of that and other key working groups, and on their decisions. Once again, we would like to say that, for our part, we are ready to actively participate in developing and implementing any initiatives that might assist in overcoming the crisis in Iraq.

We express support for the draft statement drawn up by the United States with respect to today's meeting.

Mr. Mantovani (Italy): Let me first join my colleagues in welcoming the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iraq, His Excellency Hoshyar Zebari. I would also like to thank the Special Representative of

the Secretary-General, Ambassador Qazi, and the Permanent Representative of the United States, Ambassador Khalilzad, for their informative and very interesting briefings today.

Italy believes that a stable, peaceful and prosperous Iraq is a key element of global and regional stability and, at the same time, a moral responsibility for the international community. For that reason, Italy has always been at the forefront in assisting Iraq in its efforts towards peace, stability and prosperity.

Since 2003, Italy has contributed over €270 million to international efforts in the civilian area, and last January it signed a bilateral agreement providing soft loans for up to €400 million. Italy also cancelled €2.4 billion of Iraqi debt and, with the Iraqi Government, is co-chairing the International Reconstruction Facility Fund for Iraq.

Accordingly, the Italian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Massimo D'Alema, took part in the launch of the International Compact and in the Expanded Ministerial Conference of Neighbouring Countries of Iraq, which took place in Sharm el-Sheikh on 3 and 4 May 2007. We stand ready to continue to make our contribution.

We believe that the momentum created by those meetings should not be wasted. We are therefore convinced that the reforms outlined by the International Compact with Iraq and the follow-ups of the Extended Ministerial Conference — namely, the creation of the working groups outlined at the Baghdad Conference of 10 March 2007 — should be implemented without delay and without subordinating them to the creation of new implementing tools.

We are also convinced that, although international support is critical to the success of Iraqi stabilization, the key lies ultimately in the hands of the Iraqi Government and people.

We share the view expressed by Mr. Zebari in his recent letter to the President of the Council that efforts to restore security are to be supported by political initiatives to enhance national reconciliation and promote unity among the Iraqi people. As a matter of fact, the success of any security plan will be possible only if it is adequately supported by national reconciliation, as well as by measures that have an immediate socio-economic impact.

Concrete measures actually needed in this regard include a review of the de-Baathification law; the provision of economic means through, for instance, adequate pensions, to the members of the former Iraqi army and security forces and, when possible, the reinsertion into the new armed forces of those not implicated in crimes of the past regime; the disbanding of militias; the creation of a national police force; and, more generally, a policy that offers all components of society the advantages of the new democratic Iraq, thus enlarging the base of support for the newly formed institutions.

In this framework, we also believe that the process of constitutional revision is of great importance and could provide an opportunity for expanding political dialogue. We are also encouraged by the evaluation contained in the most recent report of the Secretary-General that

> "if some of the amendments currently being discussed are ultimately agreed to, they could go some way towards establishing the basis for the national Government to play a necessary coordinating role within the decentralized federal system envisaged by Iraq's Constitution". (*S/2007/330, para. 25*)

We continue to be concerned about the situation of the internally displaced persons in Iraq and the Iraqi refugees in neighbouring countries. Against that backdrop, we welcomed the April Geneva conference, which constituted an important event for fostering international coordination in tackling this issue.

Italy has always been a strong supporter of the role of the United Nations in Iraq. We commend the outstanding work done by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and by Ambassador Qazi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General. Last March, during the Council's debate on the situation in Iraq (see S/PV.5639), Italy stated that we believed that the United Nations presence in Iraq was of fundamental importance and that we hoped that the conditions in Iraq would allow for its growth. We are therefore pleased that the Secretary-General has expressed his willingness to consider an expanded role and presence in Iraq where and when possible.

We think that an expanded role for the United Nations in Iraq could make an important contribution in many areas. We share the Secretary-General's opinion that solutions must be found through sustained

national dialogue, the patient search for compromise and within the framework of the constitution. In that connection, we also believe that, with the consent of all interested parties, the United Nations could play an essential role.

Allow me to end my remarks by saying that Italy firmly condemns today's heinous attack on the holy shrines of Imam Ali Al-Hadi and Al-Hassan Al-Askari in Samarra. We extend our most heartfelt condolences to the Iraqi people and Government and to the families of the victims. We urge Iraqis to respond to that tragic event by enhancing the ongoing national dialogue and reconciliation.

Mr. Al-Bader (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, Mr. President, I would like to thank you for convening this important meeting. I welcome the participation this afternoon of His Excellency Mr. Hoshyar Zebari, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq. Allow me also to thank Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, Permanent Representative of the United States, and Mr. Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, for their briefings to the Council on the activities of the Multinational Force and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, respectively.

The State of Qatar has reiterated the need to respect Iraq's sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity. We have also reaffirmed the need for the Iraqi people to regain their security and freedom, as well as for a commitment by all parties to non-interference in Iraq's internal affairs. It is necessary also to reject all attempts to entrench sectarianism and division and to undermine security and stability in the region. The State of Qatar also considers it important to act expeditiously to identify and address the root causes of the Iraqi crisis, especially given that the situation in the country remains extremely worrisome for all those concerned about Iraq and the region.

In order to extricate the country from its crisis, it is imperative to launch an inclusive, participatory and transparent political process that fulfils the aspirations of all factions in Iraq and integrates those factions into political life and national institutions. It is also imperative to confront the abhorrent sectarianism that now exists in Iraq. The security situation must also be brought under control and the necessary attention paid to development and reconstruction and to meeting the increasing humanitarian needs of the Iraqi population.

Significant efforts have been made to establish stability and security in Iraq both by the Iraqi Government, which months ago launched the Baghdad security plan, and by the Multinational Force. The success of those efforts has been limited in some cases. Obstacles continue to hamper the effort to bring the security situation under control and to end violence, a goal that requires enormous efforts and the strengthening of national security forces to enable them to take control of the situation.

We condemn all acts of terrorist violence in any form and from any source. The targeting of religious sites has grave consequences for the security situation in Iraq.

Expediting the improvement of the basic living conditions of the Iraqi people — a third of whom live under the poverty line, according to the Iraqi central statistical agency — is another priority that must be addressed by the Iraqi Government with the assistance of international partners, the United Nations system and intergovernmental organizations. In that regard, the International Compact with Iraq, which was launched at the recent Sharm el-Sheikh meeting, is a useful initiative aimed at strengthening the foundations of peace and relaunching socio-economic and political growth in Iraq over the next five years.

The situation of Iraqi refugees is now a real crisis whose scope and dimensions affect both Iraq and neighbouring States. The conference organized at Geneva in April by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees regarding the humanitarian needs of Iraqi displaced persons helped raise awareness of the need to support displaced persons and the States that host them. This issue continues to be a problem that requires an urgent solution.

At this critical stage in the stabilization and reconstruction efforts in Iraq, the United Nations is playing an important role in the areas of constitutional support, electoral assistance, reconstruction, development, humanitarian assistance, human rights and the rule of law. The world Organization and its specialized agencies are capable of assuming a greater role, with clear guidance from the Security Council and the Iraqi Government. In his report (S/2007/330), the Secretary-General expressed his willingness to

consider expanding the role of the United Nations. In order to do that, however, it is essential to provide the necessary infrastructure and create security conditions conducive to carrying out the task.

Mr. Gayama (Congo) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of my delegation, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for the report (S/2007/330) he has submitted for consideration by members of the Council, which pertains to the fulfilment of the responsibilities entrusted to the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). In that connection, we would like to thank Mr. Ashraf Jehangir Qazi for his briefing, as well as Ambassador Khalilzad, Permanent Representative of the United States of America, for his briefing on the activities of the Multinational Force. My delegation also listened with great interest to the statement delivered by His Excellency Mr. Hoshyar Zebari, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iraq, whose presence here today we welcome.

The overall situation in Iraq continues to be a source of major concern, not just for that country but for the entire Middle East region and the wider international community. We see recurring acts of violence, characterized by almost daily attacks, kidnappings, the taking of hostages and other heinous crimes. With regard to Iraq's rich cultural and religious heritage, which is admired by the entire world, the cost of the damage inflicted upon it is very difficult to ascertain as yet. The dangerous nature of the situation in Iraq has led to the flight of many people who have become displaced or who have simply decided to become exiles in neighbouring countries, in particular Syria and Jordan, thereby creating a major humanitarian problem in the region.

We once again condemn those violent acts, whose continuation and overwhelmingly sectarian character are aimed at nothing less than the destruction of a country, its infrastructure and its political institutions. An example of that was the 12 April 2007 attack against the Council of Representatives. However, the civilian population too is exposed to death and destruction on a daily basis.

We bring up the issue of violence in order to express our impatience as regards urgently finding satisfactory solutions to the enormous challenges to the unity of Iraqi society. Once again, those challenges include national reconciliation. The sharing of political power and equitable distribution of natural resources, in particular oil revenues.

It is mainly the responsibility of Iraqi political and religious leaders to find consensus responses through an inclusive process to the questions and difficulties of all kinds that the country is experiencing. Although the role of Iraq's neighbouring countries and the ongoing support of the international community can no longer be underestimated in the current context, it is important to keep in mind that the United Nations should remain ready to actively support the Iraqi Government. My delegation is aware of the essential role played by UNAMI to that end, and we very much welcome the work it is doing. We also welcome the leadership role of the Secretary-General through the recent initiatives for peace and reconstruction in Iraq. The Secretary-General and the United Nations system overall must stress the coordination of all efforts to help Iraq in order to be in a better position to implement future initiatives, and we can already imagine how great the importance of those initiatives will be.

As part of that effort, we wish to mention in particular the April conference in Geneva on displaced persons held under the auspices of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; the meeting in Sharm el-Sheik, Egypt, on 3 May 2007, where we saw the launching of the International Compact with Iraq; and the enhanced meeting of the neighbouring States of Iraq of 4 May, also in Sharm el-Sheik, which brought Iraq and its neighbouring countries together with the five permanent members of the Security Council and the Group of Eight.

Particular attention should therefore be given to the follow-up of the conclusions of those various meetings, as well as to the work being done in the various committees that are being asked to find domestic legislative solutions to basic issues such as hydrocarbons, provincial elections, political pluralism and amnesty.

My delegation hopes that each and every one of those various initiatives — provided that they are carried out in the interest of the Iraqi population and with a principally political perspective that remains based on consensus, as the current Iraqi authorities have worked together to do — will contribute to re-establishing trust, which is an essential condition for peace and reconstruction in the country.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I too wish to join colleagues in thanking Ambassador Qazi for his presentation on the report of the Secretary-General (S/2007/330). I also wish to extend my thanks to His Excellency the Foreign Minister of Iraq for joining the Council to give a presentation on behalf of the Iraqi Government. We are also grateful to Ambassador Khalilzad for his presentation on behalf of the Multinational Force in Iraq (MNF-I).

My Foreign Secretary earlier today strongly condemned the attack on the holy shrines in Samarra and I would like to echo that condemnation in this Chamber, as have many other speakers today. We offer our condolences to the Iraqi people and Government. The attack was a blatant and crude attempt to ferment further sectarian violence and division among the people of Iraq.

The perpetrators of that attack have only one purpose: to destroy the democratic process that the majority of Iraqis clearly support. We welcome Iraqi calls for restraint, and we urge Iraq's political leaders to redouble their efforts towards national reconciliation.

The United Kingdom is committed to the improvement and maintenance of security in Iraq through our military contribution to MNF-I and our diplomatic and development efforts. That remains a complex and challenging task. To accomplish it, we will work closely with the Government of Iraq and the Iraqi security forces to help deliver security to the Iraqi people and to meet the objectives of Security Council resolution 1723 (2006). We will continue to assist in the progressive transfer of security responsibility to the Iraqi security forces. We have now handed over security responsibility for three of the four provinces where the United Kingdom had previously shared that responsibility. We expect to hand over the fourth, Basra, in the second half of this year, should the relevant conditions be met.

We welcome the Secretary-General's emphasis on the launch of the International Compact and the Iraq neighbours conference in Sharm el-Sheik on 3 and 4 May this year. Those events are important steps in focusing the support of the international community on Iraqi needs.

The United Nations and the Government of Iraq have central roles to play in making the International Compact a success. In that regard, I welcome the formation of the Compact secretariat and look forward to the delivery of timely assistance in close cooperation with the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq and with the donor community.

As we have emphasized in previous debates on Iraq, the role of Iraq's neighbours remains crucial to improvements in security, reconstruction and national reconciliation — and that also is a point made by many speakers today. I urge those neighbours to show their support for the Government of Iraq through the three working groups established by the neighbours conference. Progress in each of the working groups' remits — security cooperation, fuel imports and Iraqi refugees — would directly help the Iraqi people. But the United Kingdom would also urge the Government of Iraq to take advantage of the window of opportunity offered by the Baghdad security plan to deliver on national reconciliation. The central pillar of that is agreement by Iraq's leaders to a revised Iraqi constitution that gives all communities a firm stake in Iraq's future. We welcome the valuable contributions of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) to the constitutional review process.

I share the concern of other representatives today that as part of the political process, it is essential that there is early agreement on legislation governing the future of the oil and gas sector, including how the huge potential wealth generated by it will be shared equitably among all communities in Iraq. Agreement also needs to be reached on reform of the process of de-Baathification. The United Kingdom encourages the Iraqi parliament to pass legislation setting a date for provincial elections, which will address the representation of all parts of Iraqi society at the provincial level.

Those are difficult issues where there are conflicting views and interests, but for precisely those reasons we encourage the Government of Iraq to be ambitious. In support of those objectives we welcome the clear request of His Excellency Minister Zebari for UNAMI and the United Nations agencies to play an enhanced role. As part of that, the United Nations has a unique role in supporting the political process. We look forward to discussion within the Security Council and with the Government of Iraq on reviewing UNAMI's mandate ahead of the expiry in August of resolution 1700 (2006).

The United Kingdom remains concerned about the humanitarian situation in Iraq and the increasing numbers of people who have been displaced by ongoing violence. It is vital that the response from the international community is clearly focused and coordinated. We encourage UNAMI's Humanitarian Coordinator and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to continue their efforts to put into operational effect the United Nations strategic framework for humanitarian action. The action plan flowing from that should direct and coordinate the efforts of the United Nations agencies, and we urge the agencies to give their full support to that process.

The United Kingdom recognizes the security difficulties that we all face when working in Iraq, and we should like to pay tribute to the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and his team in the face of those difficulties. We support the Secretary-General's proposal to fund the expeditious construction of a new United Nations building in Baghdad from within the budgeting provisions for special political missions. We welcome the possibility that the United Nations presence in Irbil will expand, and we look forward to the United Nations re-establishing its presence in Basra.

Finally, the United Kingdom welcomes the Secretary-General's personal commitment to Iraq, including his own visit to Baghdad earlier this year. That will have sent a clear signal to the Iraqi people of the priority the United Nations and the international community places on helping Iraq.

Mr. Burian (Slovakia): Let me join previous speakers in thanking Mr. Qazi for his informative briefing. We also thank Ambassador Khalilzad for his report on behalf of the countries making up the Multinational Force, including my own country. In addition, we welcome the presence at this meeting of His Excellency Mr. Hoshyar Zebari, the Foreign Minister of Iraq, and thank him for his comprehensive statement.

First, I wish to commend the ongoing efforts of the United Nations and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), under the leadership of Mr. Qazi, and their dedicated work in Iraq under truly difficult and challenging conditions and circumstances. We share the view of Mr. Zebari that strong United Nations involvement in Iraq's reconstruction and stabilization is instrumental. In that regard, we are encouraged by the fact that the Secretary-General is considering expanding the role and presence of the United Nations in Iraq where possible. We wish to emphasize our support in that respect.

We also welcome the launching of the International Compact with Iraq. Slovakia commends the Iraqi Government for the ambitious commitments it made in the Compact. We believe that timely implementation of those commitments will be central in developing and expanding the cooperation between Iraq and all its international partners, including the United Nations.

We also welcome the outcomes of the ministerial conference among Iraq's neighbouring countries with international participation, which took place in Sharm el-Sheikh on 4 May. We hope that the conference will give rise to a long-term process of regional confidence-building through dialogue and cooperation. Moreover, we are encouraged by the decision to activate the technical committees on security, refugees and energy. In our view, it is important to maintain the momentum that has been built and to seek further ways to strengthen mutual collaboration in order to address the ongoing challenges in Iraq.

At the same time, we believe that regional actors, and particularly Iraq's immediate neighbours, could and should play a more active role in promoting peace and stability in Iraq, which would benefit not only that country, but also its neighbours and the wider region. Their contributions to the success of Iraq's stabilization therefore remain instrumental.

All these efforts and initiatives and their outcomes show the international community's new level of solidarity with and commitment to Iraq, as well as its willingness to contribute actively in tackling the many challenges faced by that country and its people. However, to ensure full success, the active and full engagement of the Iraqi Government in the process of transition and stabilization remains decisive. Simply put, Iraqi ownership of that process is crucial. As the Secretary-General rightly puts it in paragraph 64 of his report (S/2007/330), "Solutions must be found through sustained national dialogue, the patient search for compromise, and within the framework of the Constitution". We hope that those principles will be reflected in all efforts to achieve lasting and sustainable peace and stability in Iraq.

In that regard, we welcome the progress achieved in the constitutional review process and commend the Constitutional Review Committee for its constructive role. We also welcome the establishment of the Independent High Electoral Commission as a notable recent achievement. On the other hand, we regret that progress was delayed on some other vital legislation, such as laws on hydrocarbons, provincial elections, de-Baathification and amnesty. We also regret that the level of violence, terrorist and sectarian attacks, human rights violations and general insecurity is still high in Iraq. That remains a source of constant concern for us. We strongly condemn all such acts of violence, including today's shocking attack on one of the holiest sites in Shia Islam, the holy shrine of Imam Ali Al-Hadi and Imam Hassan Al-Askari in Samarra. We join and support the Secretary-General in his call on all Iraqis to exercise maximum restraint and to avoid sinking into a vicious cycle of revenge.

Finally, it is also important that all possible efforts be undertaken to address the increasing humanitarian suffering of a large number of Iraqi refugees and displaced persons. In that regard, we welcome the international conference organized by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, held in Geneva on 17 and 18 April, to address the needs of Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons, as well as its positive and constructive outcomes. However, here again — and especially in this particular case — we view it as imperative it is to promote inclusive national dialogue and reconciliation among all constituencies and communities in Iraq. Only such an approach can effectively prevent further outflows of people and enable Iraqi refugees and displaced persons to return to their homes.

In conclusion, I would like to underline Slovakia's readiness to support and assist the process of peacebuilding and reconstruction in Iraq.

Mr. Soler Torrijos (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, my delegation would like to join preceding speakers in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Hoshyar Zebari, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq; we thank Mr. Zalmay Khalilzad, Permanent Representative of the United States, for his briefing on behalf of Multinational Force and Mr. Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, for his briefing.

The continuing anxiety of Iraqi citizens is a source of concern for us. We are particularly concerned about the situation of humanitarian personnel, who are attempting to alleviate the hardships of a population exposed to constant conflict, kidnappings and attacks. We are also concerned about the situation faced by those who are participating in the reconstruction of the country. All we ask is that the parties to the conflict stop endangering the lives of innocent people.

We have also noted that the spiral of violence has compelled entire populations to leave in order to escape the violence. New restrictions on the migration of displaced persons to other countries in the region are complicating the human tragedy. We realize how burdensome those movements are. However, we urge neighbouring Governments to put humanitarian needs before cold calculations concerning migration.

In this critical situation, greater financial commitments will be essential. UNICEF's figures regarding the situation of children and the lack of access to drinking water and food reflect the gradual deterioration seen in statistical indicators. It is imperative to coordinate a comprehensive strategy that does not leave these populations adrift.

We recognize that there are also reasons for encouragement. The international community unanimously recognizes the great importance of the situation in Iraq. The International Compact with Iraq gives us cause for optimism. Combined with the goodwill of creditor countries in forgiving the debt of the Iraqi State, it is an unequivocal signal of the international community's interest in promoting the development of Iraq. The energy invested by the Iraqi Government in promoting peacebuilding, the human rights monitoring being carried out by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), its technical assistance to strengthen Iraq's electoral system and constitutional organization, and the World Food Programme's assistance efforts aimed at vulnerable groups are also to be commended.

Finally, we support UNAMI and the Government of Iraq in their efforts to achieve a peaceful Iraq with a democratic Government and without foreign troops. We can attain those objectives only if we insist tenaciously on national dialogue. As the Iraqi poet Salah Al-Hamdani urges us, "We must still traverse/ side by side/the barbed wire of words". Undoubtedly, the results obtained by the Independent High Electoral

Commission and the Constitutional Review Committee will be effective only if they reflect a sincere desire — of which we now see little evidence — to find a political solution to the impasse afflicting Iraq.

Mr. Kleib (Indonesia): Let me join other delegations in welcoming the Foreign Minister of Iraq to the Council and in thanking him for his presentation. My delegation is also grateful to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Mr. Qazi, for his comprehensive briefing.

Iraq and the Iraqis, like other nations, have every right to live in peace, without fear and in dignity. My delegation, therefore, is very concerned over the continuing political, sectarian and criminal violence that deprives the Iraqis of these rights.

We note the pause in sectarian conflict after the introduction of a security plan, but it was so brief and so frivolous that a chance for sustainable peace could not be seized. Now, clashes among factions continue and hostilities occur on an almost daily basis.

Indonesia condemns all terrorist attacks. In this regard, we express our deep sympathy to the families of the victims of today's attack in Sammara.

We welcome the commitment of the Iraqi Government to security and stability as its highest priority, not only in Baghdad, but also in the rest of the country. However, my delegation stresses the urgent need for the protection of civilians and the strict observance of international human rights and humanitarian law whenever security measures are enacted upon.

Atrocities in Iraq cannot be fully responded to by a security approach. Those acts are rooted in the complexities with which the Iraqis continue to grapple. In our view, a soft-power approach that promotes inclusiveness and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms must also be sought. In this regard, Indonesia supports the efforts of the Iraqi Government to engage leaders from across the political and religious spectrum to promote confidence-building through national dialogue and reconciliation.

In realizing its commitment to support Iraqi unity, on 3 and 4 April 2007 Indonesia hosted the International Conference of Islamic Leaders for Reconciliation in Iraq. The Conference adopted a declaration aimed at realizing inclusive reconciliation based on such values as peace, justice and equality, freedom, tolerance, balance and consultation.

My delegation also underlines the significance of national dialogue and recognizes the urgency of seeking reconciliation within the governing coalition. We support Prime Minister Al-Maliki's efforts to promote the unity of government.

The humanitarian consequences of the continuing violence in Iraq are a matter of great concern to my delegation. We highly appreciate the role of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian actors in addressing the needs of the Iraqi internally displaced persons and refugees. We commend the generosity of the receiving countries. My delegation welcomes the convening in Geneva in April 2007 of an international conference on displaced Iraqis. That was an important initiative in seeking collective solutions to the humanitarian challenges that affect the region as a whole.

Considering the magnitude of challenges that the Iraqis are facing now, support and assistance from countries in the region and the international community remain critical. Only through their contribution can Iraq fulfil its enormous human and economic potential.

Indonesia welcomes the convening of the expanded ministerial conference of neighbouring countries of Iraq in Sharm el-Sheikh on 4 May 2007. We look forward to the implementation of the three technical committees established at the conference on security, displaced Iraqis and energy supplies.

My delegation also attaches particular importance to the International Compact with Iraq, which marks a new partnership between Iraq and the international community. We fully support the role of the United Nations in helping Iraq achieve the goals of the Compact.

With regard to the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, we continue to underline its importance in providing Iraq with constitutional support activities, electoral assistance, human rights promotion and development and humanitarian assistance. We welcome the intention of the Secretary-General to consider an expanded role and presence of the United Nations in Iraq. Under the current circumstances, in our view, there are at least three possible ways to enhance the role of the United Nations in Iraq. These are the flexible presence of more

United Nations institutions in the country; a greater institutional foothold at United Nations Headquarters; and stronger United Nations support for Iraq in various international processes.

Iraq is experiencing a major transformation. We empathize with the challenges with which the Iraqis are dealing in such a process. A transformation of this magnitude cannot be done instantly and hastily. Indonesia reaffirms its full support for the Iraqis in their pursuit of a peaceful, stable, prosperous and democratic Iraq.

Ms. Qwabe (South Africa): We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Qazi and Ambassador Khalilzad for their briefings, and we welcome Foreign Minister Zebari and thank him for his briefing as well.

My delegation remains concerned that the security situation in Iraq continues to deteriorate. We maintain that a new resolution to the conflict in Iraq has to include an all-inclusive political process and national reconciliation, as well as constructive dialogue with all neighbouring States.

We welcome the launch of the International Compact with Iraq, and we note the commitment of the participants to work in partnership with the Government of Iraq to ensure stability, security and economic reconstruction. Initiatives such as the expanded ministerial conference of neighbouring countries of Iraq, held in Sharm el-Sheikh on 4 May, and the meeting of the United States and Iran in Baghdad on 28 May are also welcome.

A report issued this month by Global Policy Forum indicates that as of April 2007, an estimated 1.9 million Iraqis were displaced within the country and over 2.2 million were refugees abroad. The Iraqi Government estimates that 50,000 people are leaving their homes each month. The scale of the problem and the difficulty of reaching the displaced put the crisis practically beyond the capacity of the international relief system.

The International Advisory and Monitoring Board for the Development Fund for Iraq met in Amman on 2 and 3 June 2007. A key finding was that, while the current situation in Iraq is challenging, it is worrisome that insufficient progress has been made in addressing the weaknesses revealed in the area of this report. The latest audit report of the Development Fund for Iraq submitted to the Board by Ernst and Young indicates that while many efforts are being made, sometimes at great personal sacrifice, the overall financial system of control is deficient and financial management reform needs to be pursued further. The audit also notes large unreconciled differences regarding oil extraction, production and reported export sales because there is no overall comprehensive system of controls over oil revenues. A system of metering, as recommended by the Board, would go a long way in improving overall control. The audit also notes that basic administrative procedures in ministries are outdated and ineffective, and the system of overall financial governance needs to be strengthened.

The Security Council has the responsibility to ensure that the natural resources of Iraq are used in a transparent manner to meet the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people, for the economic reconstruction and repair of Iraq's infrastructure and for other purposes benefiting the people of Iraq. It is therefore essential that the Security Council discusses and acts on the findings of the Board without delay.

We reiterate that, notwithstanding the events that led to the current situation, the Security Council has a responsibility for ensuring that the powers it granted to the Multinational Force are exercised in a manner consistent with the Council's decision and that international law and human rights are upheld and respected by all parties.

We note that the Secretary-General reports that the security situation in Iraq remains complex and unpredictable and is a major limiting factor for the United Nations presence and activities in Iraq. The United Nations has a particularly important role to play, but the full potential of the Organization to assist the Iraqi people can be realized only when its personnel can operate freely in a secure environment.

In conclusion, we also support the draft press statement presented by the delegation of the United States of America.

Mr. Gallardo (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would first like to welcome to the Council the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq, His Excellency Mr. Hoshyar Zebari. I would like also to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Mr. Ashraf Qazi, for his briefing and the representative of the United States for his briefing on behalf of the Multinational Force in Iraq (MNF-I).

The circumstances in which we are meeting today continue to be critical in Iraq, as illustrated, once again, by the report of the Secretary-General (S/2007/330), and by the most recent reports of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) on the human rights situation in that country. Violence has intensified again, following the initial drop in criminal acts of sectarian origin that resulted from the implementation of the Baghdad security plan — although, unfortunately, we do not have official data. The attacks are nevertheless being repeated, as happened this morning at the Al-Askari shrine. Likewise, the violence in Basra has caused the United Nations to leave its headquarters in that city. Peru condemns the sectarian violence and acts of ethnic, tribal or religious intolerance, and it rejects all terrorist acts committed in Iraq.

Moreover, the reconciliation agenda seems plagued with difficulties. Reconstruction is very slow and the consequences of the conflict are reflected in dramatic figures, such as the existence of 30,000 to 50,000 new refugees each month, the more than 800,000 internally displaced persons, according to some figures, and the fact that 17 per cent of primary school students have left school or that only 34 per cent of girls and 43 per cent of boys attend secondary school, and that university education has been severely affected by the violence. The levels of malnutrition also show a deterioration of social indicators. These are factors that cast a shadow over the future of Iraq, despite the efforts of the Government to make progress in the area of security or in the stabilization of the currency and the economy.

Regrettably, the seriousness of the situation has still not generated in those Iraqis who seek to secure a future for their country a quick but sustained mobilization towards the dialogue that could be opened up in their country in order to deal with the basic issues that are affecting life for everyone.

The Iraqis and their authorities first and foremost, as well as the neighbouring countries, the regional players and other external players present in Iraq, must act with the greatest caution and the utmost diligence in the current situation to find ways out of delicate situations and move the country forward in key areas, such as constitutional reform, the distribution of oil revenues, the distribution of regional and federal power, the situation of Kirkuk, the changes in the de-Baathification process and the creation of national security bodies which are effective, credible and legitimate, as well as cooperating in the stability of the country and in the full recovery of its sovereignty.

The task of reconstruction in Iraq is a central subject for its Government and, unfortunately, there have been many delays and much backsliding because of the situation of insecurity and ungovernability. The International Compact with Iraq is an important reference point for international assistance. Conditions for its implementation will be enhanced with improved security, reconciliation, transparency and laws that reflect solid political agreements for the management of natural resources. Iraq's oil wealth must be handled responsibly and with transparency. The distribution of oil revenues must be negotiated, which will help to reinforce the spirit of understanding among Iraqis and their trust that these resources will be used to build a better future, particularly for the country's citizens.

It is clear that what is needed is an evaluation of the strategic orientation and of the means necessary for all the internal players in Iraq to regain the country's stability and its viability as unified, sovereign and independent State. At this stage, that includes an evaluation of the presence in the country of the Multinational Force, of which the Government of Iraq has asked for an extension.

Peru supports the initiatives to contribute to re-establishing trust among all sectors of Iraqi society. We hope that these initiatives will be translated into a drop in the level of violence in the country, particularly in Baghdad and in other multi-ethnic and pluricultural cities that have seen an increase in violent acts.

We encourage the Government of Iraq and those responsible for its security forces to act with determination to implement security and protection policies for all of its citizens and to strengthen the central control of its public powers. Caution dictates that all types of internal confrontations between Iraqis should be discouraged since in the long run the consequences of an escalation are unpredictable. At the same time, we repeat that the use of force must be carried out in full respect of the international commitments undertaken, particularly those in the area of human rights and international humanitarian law.

There must be no room for impunity in the construction of democratic institutions in Iraq. The raison d'être of the Iraqi State is the defence of the life and the human rights of its citizens, and whoever

attacks the rule of law and the human rights of the citizens of Iraq must be brought to justice.

Finally, my delegation would like to express its support for the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq. We feel that it should continue to function in accordance with its mandate and with the options in the field in the consolidation of all the tasks that contribute to political and legal stability, to institutional and economic reconstruction, and to provide humanitarian aid and to protect human rights in Iraq.

Mr. Li Junhua (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation welcomes the presence of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq, Mr. Zebari, at today's meeting of the Security Council. We also wish to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Mr. Qazi, and Ambassador Khalilzad of the United States for their briefings.

China strongly condemns the attack on the holy shrine of Imam Ali al-Hadi in Iraq today. We call upon the various factions of Iraq to maintain unity and exercise restraint so as to stabilize the situation as soon as possible.

Since the end of the Iraq war, the people of that country have been traversing an extremely unusual path, having overcome enormous difficulties under exceptional circumstances. The people of Iraq have basically completed the political transition as provided by resolution 1546 (2004). At present, Iraq is entering a new phase of development, where unity, stability and development are the three major objectives that it is striving to attain.

First, unity is the basis for stability. All ethnic and religious groups should place the overall interest of the nation above everything else by facilitating dialogue, overcoming differences and promoting reconciliation on such sensitive issues as the constitution and legislation. The Government of Iraq should spare no efforts in seeking the views of people in all walks of life, with a view to reaching consensus on a programme that satisfies all parties. In this regard, we appreciate the constructive efforts made by the Constitutional Review Committee and the Independent High Electoral Commission.

Secondly, stability is the prerequisite for development. Undeniably, how to improve the security situation is the biggest challenge that Iraq now faces. It will determine the future course of political, economic and social development in Iraq. We have taken note of the measures taken by the Government of Iraq and by the Multinational Force in order to improve the security situation and of the results achieved in this regard. We hope that the Iraqi Government will be able gradually to take on more responsibility for its national security and thereby address the root causes of the security problem. That is also what the Iraqi people have been awaiting anxiously.

Thirdly, the pursuit of unity and stability has development as its objective. The Government should strive to achieve rapid progress in the field of economic reconstruction, improve the lives of its people and create a mechanism for the independent development of Iraq. Last month the International Compact with Iraq was launched at Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, where proposed measures for the reconstruction of Iraq were considered and the international consensus was reaffirmed. We hope that, with the joint efforts of all the parties concerned, the International Compact will be implemented.

The unity, stability and development of Iraq cannot be achieved without the support and participation of its neighbouring States and the international community as a whole. In that regard, we welcome the expanded ministerial meeting of Foreign Ministers of States neighbouring Iraq held at Sharm el-Sheikh last month, as well as the consultations held between the United States and Iraq at the ambassadorial level. We hope that the parties concerned will continue their efforts to find an adequate solution to other regional hotspots through dialogue and consultation, so as to create an environment conducive to the settlement of the question of Iraq.

We support the taking of active measures by the United Nations, where conditions permit, with a view to expanding its role in the political and economic reconstruction of Iraq.

As a longstanding friend of the people of Iraq, China supports the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Iraq and advocates the finding of an adequate solution to the differences between the various factions in Iraq through a political process and in a peaceful and democratic manner.

China appreciates the efforts made by the Government of Iraq aimed at achieving reconciliation and at stabilizing the situation. China supports the

efforts made to speed up the reconstruction of Iraq, in accordance with the principle of equality and openness, and to improve the lives of the Iraqi people and the humanitarian situation in the country.

The Chinese Government will provide 5 million yuan renminbi in free aid to Iraq, which will be earmarked for the health and education fields, inter alia. The Chinese Government is ready drastically to reduce the Iraqi debt to China and to cancel all governmental debt to China. China sincerely hopes that, with the support and assistance of the international community and the unremitting efforts of the people themselves, the Iraqi people will at an early date achieve the rule of Iraq by the Iraqis themselves and enjoy peace, tranquillity and prosperity.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a brief statement in my capacity as representative of Belgium.

I, too, would like to thank the Special Representative, Ambassador Qazi, for his statement, as well as Ambassador Khalilzad for his statement on behalf of the Multinational Force in Iraq (MNF-I).

Once again, I welcome the presence of His Excellency Hoshyar Zebari, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq, and convey to him our Government's firm condemnation of the attacks that took place today against the shrines of the Imams Ali Al-Hadi and Al-Hassan Al-Askari in Samarra, which are aimed at fomenting additional sectarian violence.

During our prior discussions, Belgium had shared the concern expressed by the Secretary-General about the danger that violence in Iraq poses to a society, institutions and a political process that remain fragile. While there is no clear improvement in the security and humanitarian situation in the country, we note the first signs of a growing awareness of the situation in Iraq in the region and in the international community as a whole.

When one adds the daily casualties of sectarian and terrorist violence to the more than 4 million refugees in and outside of Iraq, it becomes clear that this crisis involves not only Iraq; its consequences affect us all.

At the political level, Iraq's neighbours and the rest of the international community, after being deeply divided on the Iraqi issue, saw that no solution was possible in the absence of a unified and sustained commitment involving the Iraqi authorities. No actor alone can resolve the problems currently facing Iraq. It is only by overcoming the sectarian, regional and international divisions that the Iraqi people can achieve the peace and security that they so richly deserve.

In the past few months, this greater awareness has resulted in a number of initiatives, which Belgium welcomes and in which it participated directly or through the European Union. In April the Geneva Conference on displaced persons was held, organized by the High Commissioner for Refugees. In early May, the International Compact was launched at Sharm el-Sheikh, immediately followed by the ministerial conference bringing together Iraq, its neighbours and a number of major international stakeholders.

The holding of those conferences bears witness to the re-involvement of regional and international actors in support of a process of reconciliation and reconstruction in Iraq. The long-term success of the efforts undertaken at those meetings and of the current momentum depends, however, on developing follow-up mechanisms to those conferences. The United Nations, the Secretary-General and his Special Representative have played key roles in these various processes. Mindful of the very unfavourable security conditions prevailing in Iraq, Belgium deems it crucial that the political and consultation role played by the United Nations and hopes to see it strengthened and expanded.

Moreover, we support the ongoing presence of the MNF-I, as requested by the Iraqi Government and called for in resolution 1723 (2006). Although their support is vital, we must recall that the efforts of neither the international community nor the United Nations nor Iraq's neighbours can substitute for the responsible actions of the Iraqis themselves. Belgium would therefore encourage the Iraqi authorities to intensify their efforts towards national reconciliation, with particular attention paid to the constitutional review process. We would also emphasize the need to strengthen the rule of law, in particular by establishing security forces loyal to the central Government and independent of sectarian or partisan allegiances.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I shall now give the floor to Mr. Qazi to respond to comments made and questions raised.

Mr. Qazi: I think that it remains for me to thank the member countries for their very valuable observations and comments. There were not too many questions as such, but we have taken due note of them and will be guided by them.

Iraq is, of course, at a critical point in its transition process, and it is entitled to the support of the international community, the region and its neighbours in the various measures it is taking to bring about a new Iraq in which all participants can share in its prosperity, peace and stability. I wish to assure the Council that the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) stands ready, even in these challenging circumstances — always subject to security, which we have to take into account — and intends to be there in sufficient numbers in order to meet the expectations of the Government and people of Iraq. We believe that we have the capacity, and we certainly have the intention, to respond to any request from the Government of Iraq and the international community, as expressed in the Council, to play a greater role if that is what is required, always circumstances permitting.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Qazi for the clarifications he has provided.

There are no further speakers on the list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.